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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 000049

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/04

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SUBJECT: EX-PRESIDENT HIPOLITO MEJIA ON THE OPPOSITION PRD AND THE
UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL/MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

REF: A) 09 SANTO DOMINGO 1174; B) 09 SANTO DOMINGO 566

CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Margulies, Pol-Econ Counselor, Department of
State, Embassy Santo Domingo; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Former President Hipolito Mejia (2000-2004), in a 2 Feb 2010 meeting with Pol-Econ Counselor and Polchief, criticized opposition Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) President Miguel Vargas Maldonado for trying to run the party as if it were a business; discounted the possibility that challenges to the victory by Vargas loyalists in last year's PRD Convention would prosper; predicted that the Dominican Government's (GoDR) corruption and lack of transparency would be major campaign issues for the PRD, along with unemployment and narcotrafficking; and said that he would actively campaign for PRD candidates in the upcoming campaign for congressional/municipal elections. Mejia praised the Central Electoral Board for insisting that all parties respect the legal requirement to run women for at least one-third of the candidates at each level, thought that the ruling Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) would be better off without its Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) allies, and opined that Danilo Medina (who Mejia defeated for the Presidency in 2000), would again be the PLD candidate in 2012. Mejia hinted that he may also be thinking of a 2012 run, as after the May elections he intends to embark on a campaign to improve his own political image. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a wide-ranging hour-long meeting with Pol-Econ Counselor and Polchief on 2 Feb 2010, former President Mejia, who currently heads a minority PRD faction, made the following points:

n DOMINICAN REVOLUTIONARY PARTY: Party President Miguel Vargas Maldonado is inexperienced politically and makes the mistake of thinking that he can run the party like he does one of his businesses. This will rebound against him, as the PRD is a democratic party and has been since its founding in 1935. Vargas may be riding high at the moment, but is building up trouble for the future. That said, the challenges to last year's internal party leadership election at the PRD Convention by dissident PRD stalwarts Guido Gomez Mazara and Tony Pena Guaba (Ref A) will probably be rejected by the Central Electoral Board (JCE), whose decision is final and must be respected (Note: The JCE rejected the challenges on 3 Feb 2010). Vargas' political naivetC led him to enter into a political pact with President Leonel Fernandez, resulting in the new Constitution (Ref B). While Vargas now recognizes he made a mistake, he has no choice but to live with it and move on.

n THE CONGRESSIONAL/MUNICIPAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN: The PRD will carry out a civil but highly critical campaign in the 16 May 2010 elections, targeting the Fernandez government's corruption, lack of transparency, and failure to deal with unemployment and

narcotrafficking. That said, most voters will be heavily influenced by local issues and the reputation of the respective candidates each party offers. Consequently, the party needs to put forward candidates with strong local followings and it is a mistake on Vargas' part to nominate loyalists like PRD Secretary General-elect Orlando Jorge Mera as senatorial candidates in important provinces like Santiago, where they have no firm roots. The PRD will rely heavily on national campaigning by those of its candidates with sterling reputations, such as Santo Domingo senatorial candidate Milagros Ortiz Bosch (Mejia's Vice President from 2000-2004 and niece of party co-founder Juan Bosch). Mejia himself joined with Vargas and other faction leaders in convincing Ortiz to run, noting that her major concern was obtaining sufficient financial support for her campaign as "she has no money;" the PRD leaders assured her that adequate funding would be provided.

n THE CENTRAL ELECTORAL BOARD (JCE): The JCE is a strong institution and should carry out free and fair elections. It showed its mettle and did the right thing with its recent decision to reject a joint request from the PLD and PRD to relax the

requirement that women occupy at least one-third of the candidacies at all levels. "That is the law," he thundered, "and it must be enforced."

n THE PLD/PRSC ALLIANCE: The PLD would be better off jettisoning its PRSC partner, which has at most four percent of the electorate and is fading away, although it does have a few excellent members, such as party president (and Foreign Minister) Carlos Morales Troncoso and National Deputy Ito Bisono. The PRD was allied to the PRSC in the past and found it to be, "a disaster." (COMMENT: While the detailed negotiations are not yet finalized, it looks like the PLD/PRSC alliance will be maintained for the 2010 elections. END COMMENT). Danilo Medina is the front-runner for the PLD presidential nomination in 2012, but the possibility that Fernandez might try to place his wife, Margarita Cedeno de Fernandez, as head of the PLD ticket, should not be discounted.

n POLITICAL PARTY LAW: Congress will likely pass this law this year, although this may not occur until after the congressional/municipal elections. The law will improve democratic practices within parties, thereby preventing leaders such as Vargas from treating their party like their own business, and decrease the possibilities for the ruling party to use government resources to further its candidates' campaigns.

n MEJIA'S FUTURE: The former President will campaign nationwide for PRD candidates. Following the election he will embark on a personal campaign to defend his personal image, noting that a recent poll he commissioned showed that the popular perception was that he was responsible for the 2003 banking frauds and resulting economic crisis. While the frauds occurred on his watch, he will emphasize that the bankers implicated were all arrested and put on trial by his government.

13. (C) COMMENT: Mejia, after sparring publicly with Vargas over the past year over internal PRD issues (privately they reportedly get along; Mejia's son is married to Vargas' sister), is putting their party feud aside in order to show a combined front in support of PRD candidates during the election campaign. His planned campaign to vindicate his image hints that he may be exploring running again for the presidency in 2012. In a separate meeting with Polchief on 1 Feb 2010, Milagros Ortiz Bosch agreed with Mejia that the Political Party Law would be delayed until after the 11 May 2010 elections and that quotas for women were essential to building institutional support for female candidates. END COMMENT.

Lambert